

Message Text

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S E C R E T BOGOTA 4602

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (MRS.CARTER)

SUBJECT: VISIT OF MRS CARTER TO COLOMBIA

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS UNFORTUNATELY DECIDED TO DO NO MORE THAN BARE MINIMUM NECESSARY IN HOSTING VISIT OF MRS. CARTER. THIS IS NO DOUBT A CALCULATED MOVE LARGELY PROMPTED BY HIS RESENTMENT OVER NOMINATION OF NEW U.S. AMBASSADOR. IT DISPLAYS WORST SIDE OF LOPEZ' CHARACTER AND TAKE SOME OF THE SHINE OFF THE VISIT. NONETHELESS, I THINK THERE ARE COMPELLING REASONS FOR CARRYING ON WITH THE TRIP TO BOGOTA, PARTICULARLY IN ORDER TO REALIZE VISIT'S POTENTIAL FOR REBUILDING OUR RELATIONS. LOPEZ HAS HIS FAULTS AND PREJUDICES BUT THEY HAVE BEEN WELL KNOWN FOR SOME TIME AND I BETIEVE WE SHOULD NOT GIVE UP TRYING TO ESTABLISH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING WITH A MAN WHO PRESIDES WITH DEDICATION OVER A FUNCTIONING LATIN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY. END SUMMARY.

1. I HAVE BEEN TRYING FOR PAST SEVERAL WEEKS TO GET GOC TO SET THE EXACT TIME FOR THE MEETING PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS AGREED TO HAVE WITH MRS. CARTER AND ALSO TO HAVE THEM CONFIRM THE SOCIAL EVENT WE WERE TOLD WOULD BE GIVEN IN MRS. CARTER'S HONOR. IN VIEW OF THE TIMING OF THE VISIT , AMONG OHER FACTORS, I HAD ASSUMED THAT LOPEZ WOULD BE GIVING A DINNER THE EVENING OF JUNE 9. THIS WOULD BE STANDARD AND ALSO EXPECTED BY THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC. WE PRESSED ESPECIALLY HARD TO HAVE THESE MATTERS PINNED DOWN BEFORE
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THE ARRIVAL OF THE ADVANCE PARTY YESTERDAY BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS. VERY LATE YESTERDAY, CHIEF OF PROTOCOL (AMBASSADOR TORRES) PHONED POLITICAL COUNSELOR TO SAY, MATTER-OF-FACTLY, THAT A "CUP OF CHAMP-AGNE" (RECEPTION) WOULD BE HELD FOR MRS. CARTER AT 6:30 PM ON JUNE 9, PRESUMABLY AT THE PALACE. POL COUNSELOR ASKED IF HE WAS CORRECT IN UNDERSTANDING THAT NO DINNER WOULD BE GIVEN IN MRS. CARTER'S HONOR AND TORRES REPLIED THAT THAT WAS TRUE.

IN RESPONSE TO A FURTHER QUESTION, TORRES ADDED THAT WE COULD CONSIDER OURSELVES FREE TO MAKE OUR OWN DINNER ARRANGEMENTS FOR MRS. CARTER AND HER PARTY. HE WENT ON TO REMIND US THAT JUNE 9 WAS A RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY AND THAT THEREFORE "THE PALACE WOULD BE EMPTY THAT DAY."

2. TORRES WAS STILL UNABLE TO SET EXACT TIME FOR THE MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT BUT SAID THAT IT WOULD TAKE PLACE THE FOLLOWING MORNING JUNE 10TH. HE ALSO INFORMED US THAT MRS. LOPEZ, THE WIFE OF THE PRESIDENT, WOULD WELCOME MRS. CARTER AT THE AIRPORT AND THAT THE "CUP OF CHAMPAGNE" WOULD BE FOR LADIES ONLY; I.E. THE PRESIDENT WOULD NOT BE PRESENT.

3. COMMENT: TORRES HAS NO PERSONAL AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF THIS SORT AND THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT HIS REMARKS ARE BASED ON DECISIONS AND ATTITUDES ADOPTED BY PRESIDENT LOPEZ PERSONALLY. AS REPORTED IN BOGOTA 4540, WE HAD NOTICED EARLIER SOME SIGNS OF COOLNESS BUT, FRANKLY, WE WERE NOT PREPARED FOR LOPEZ' DECISION TO DO NO MORE THAN BARE, PROTOCOLARY MINIMUM IN HOSTING MRS. CARTER'S VISIT. MOREOVER, THE LADIES-ONLY SOCIAL EVENT, LIKE DECISION TO HAVE MRS. LOPEZ GO TO THE AIRPORT, APPARENTLY REFLECTS PRESIDENT'S IDEA THAT THIS VISIT IS TO BE TREATED OUTWARDLY AT LEAST AS A WIVES' AFFAIR, DESPITE OUR EMPHASIS ON ITS SUBSTANTIVE PURPOSE.

4. MY COLLEAGUES AND I ARE, REGRETABLELY, UNANIMOUS IN INTERPRETING ALL THIS AS A CALCULATED SLIGHT BY PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND WE ALSO BELIEVE IT WILL BE PERCEIVED THAT WAY WITHIN THE COLOMBIAN "ESTABLISHMENT". IN SUCH A MOOD, THE PRESIDENT, CHARACTERIS-
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TICALLY, WOULD NOT BE DETERRED BY LIKELIHOOD THAT MRS. CARTER'S RECEPTION HERE WILL STAND OUT AS LESS WARM THAN IN OTHER HOST COUNTRIES. INDEED, HE MAY REGARD THIS CONTRAST AS SERVING HIS PURPOSES. LATTER COULD INCLUDE REGISTERING DISPLEASURE OVER FACT THAT PRESIDENT CARTER HIMSELF IS NOT COMING TO COLOMBIA. HOWEVER, I BELIEVE LOPEZ IS MAINLY PROMPTED BY HIS RESENTMENT OVER THE NOMINATION OF THE NEW U.S.AMBASSADOR TO COLOMBIA, REPORTED EARLIER. HE IS BEING SUSTAINED AND ENCOURAGED IN THAT ATTITUDE BY PRESS AND PUBLIC COMMENTS ARISING FROM THE LEAK CARRIED ON THE WIRE SERVICES. IT WOULD ALSO BE IN CHARACTER FOR HIM AND HIS FOREIGN MINISTER TO FEEL THAT THE LEAK WAS DELIBERATELY AIMED AT THEM.

5. WE DISCUSSED WITH THE ADVANCE PARTY YESTERDAY HOW BEST TO REACT TO THESE DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING MRS. CARTER'S TRIP. QUESTION CAME UP WHETHER WASHINGTON SHOULD CONSIDER CANCELLING THE VISIT TO BOGOTA, BUT I, AND MY STAFF, BELIEVE THAT WOULD BE UNWARRANTED

AND AN OVER-REACTION. WE ADVISE INSTEAD FOCUSING ON THE IMPORTANT POSITIVE FACTORS THAT STILL SURROUND THE TRIP TO BOGOTA. THE MEETING

WITH PRESIDENT LOPEZ REMAINS ON THE AGENDA. IT HAS BEEN AT THE HEART

OF THE TRIP ALL ALONG AND MRS. CARTER CAN STILL EXPECT TO HAVE A SUB-
STANTIVE AND FRIENDLY DISCUSSION WITH HIM. ADDED CARE,
HOWEVER, SHOULD BE TAKEN IN HANDLING THE NARCOTICS/CORRUPTION ISSUE,
IF IT HAS TO BE RAISED. AND I THINK IT WOULD BE BETTER NOT
TO RAISE IT NOW. MOREOVER, KNOWING MRS.
CARTER'S ABILITIES I THINK THERE IS AN EXCELLENT CHANCE THAT
THEIR CONVERSATION COULD IMPROVE THE ATMOSPHERE AND START US
TOWARDS A REBUILDING OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. MRS. LOPEZ,
WHO CAN BE COUNTED UPON TO BE GRACIOUS, WILL ALSO BE OF HELP IN
THIS DIRECTION. THERE IS EVERY REASON TO EXPECT THAT COLOMBIAN
PRESS COVERAGE OF THE VISIT WILL BE HEAVY, COURTEOUS AND POSITIVE.
AS FOR THE ACCOMPANYING US PRESS CORPS, THE FACT THAT JUNE 9
IS A HOLIDAY AND THAT BOGOTA IS NOTORIOUS FOR BEING RESERVED,
STUFFY COMMUNITY WILL HELP EXPLAIN AWAY ANY LOW-KEYED ASPECTS PER-
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6. WE ALSO DISCUSSED WITH THE ADVANCE PARTY THE POSSIBILITY OF
MRS. CARTER'S HOSTING A DINNER OR RECEPTION AT THE RESIDENCE THE
EVENING OF JUNE 9. I RECOMMEND THAT THIS BE CONSIDERED IN
WASHINGTON, INCLUDING POSSIBILITY OF INVITING PRESIDENT
AND MRS. LOPEZ. EVEN IF THEY EXCUSED THEMSELVES, WE COULD STILL
PUT TOGETHER A STIMULATING AND NEWS-WORTHY GROUP OF LARGELY
COLOMBIAN GUESTS AND THEREBY ADD ANOTHER POSITIVE FEATURE TO THE
VISIT.
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